

BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF GYPSY MOTH

At

LAKEHURST NAVAL AIR ENGINEERING CENTER

2006

Prepared by

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ABSTRACT

On November 15 2006, USDA Forest Service personnel conducted a gypsy moth egg mass survey at Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center. The purposes of this survey were to evaluate the efficacy of this year's treatment, determine population densities, assess the potential for defoliation and the need for treatment in 2007. Current populations are sufficient to cause heavy defoliation on 719 acres. Treatment is recommended.

METHODS

Gypsy moth survey plots were randomly selected based upon available host trees (oak species), size of sample area and uniformity between egg mass counts. At each sample point, a 1/40th acre fixed radius plot was established. The plots consisted of a tally of all the new (2006) egg masses observed on the overstory trees, understory vegetation, ground litter and duff. The total number of egg masses observed for each plot was multiplied by 40 to determine the number of egg masses per acre. Egg mass lengths were measured at the plots to determine the overall "health" of the existing population and as a measure of egg mass fecundity.

RESULTS

The location of the survey plots along with the 2006 treatment areas are shown in Figure 1. The summarized results of the survey are presented in Table 1. In brief, egg mass densities ranged from 0-21,360 and averaged 3737 egg masses per acre. Overall egg mass lengths tended to be moderate to large in size, ranging from 16-38 mm and averaging 28 mm.

DISCUSSION

The basic guidelines used to evaluate the risk of defoliation include: previous defoliation events; number of egg masses/acre; size and condition of the egg masses; available preferred food; and risk of larval blow-in following egg hatch. Potential defoliation is categorized as; light (1-30 percent); moderate (31-60 percent); and heavy (61-100 percent).

The egg mass survey results indicate that heavy defoliation (61-100 percent) is likely to occur in these two areas totaling 719 acres of Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center in 2007 (Figure 2).

This defoliation prediction is further supported when egg density is also used as a means of estimating gypsy moth population densities. Moore and Jones (1987) found that estimating the mean fecundity would increase the precision of gypsy moth density estimates and that a linear relationship exists between egg mass length and fecundity.

Further work by Liebhold et al., (1993) demonstrates that the product of the mean egg mass length (mm) and egg mass density provides a more precise means of estimating population densities and prediction defoliation. Using Liebhold's model, Figure 3, shows how this information can be used to correlate the predicted defoliation of an area.

Accordingly, the estimated egg mass density of 4793 masses per acre (average egg mass density in the area located in the western portion of Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center \times 31 mm (average egg mass length) translates to a projected defoliation level of about 81 percent (heavy defoliation). Because egg mass densities and the host type are not evenly distributed, actual defoliation will vary from tree to tree but will be predominately heavy throughout these areas. Heavy defoliation is also predicted for the area north of the airport and south of the Wildlife Area.

Based on existing egg mass densities and the general size of egg masses, gypsy moth populations appear to be building and healthy throughout most areas surveyed at Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center. The overall average egg mass length is 28 mm. Egg masses larger than 25 mm typically indicate healthy populations with no obvious stress from either the gypsy moth nucleopolyhedrosis virus (NPV) or the *Entomophaga maimaiga* fungus, two of the primary natural control agents that often express themselves in declining or stressed populations. There was no evidence that either one of these entomopathogens had significant impacts at Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center in 2006. Although it is still possible that either the gypsy moth fungus or the NPV could cause the general collapse of the gypsy moth population next year, it is unlikely that populations will collapse prior to a significant defoliation event occurring in 2007.

The results from the 2006 gypsy moth suppression project were good. Egg mass densities in the treatment areas have been reduced 85% from the pre-treatment level (2005) of 4782 egg masses per acre to the current level of 731 egg masses per acre. Egg mass lengths in the treatment area now average 24 mm, a reduction of 5 mm from 2005 levels. Only 1 acre of defoliation was detected within the treatment areas and only 16.7 acres of the 2006 treatment areas need to be re-treated in 2007.

Predicting the extent of tree mortality that would occur after one year's defoliation is difficult, however, a stand of trees that is not stressed by other agents during or immediately following a single heavy defoliation will likely pull through with only minor branch dieback and minimal mortality. Trees that are defoliated in excess of 60 percent normally refoliate the same growing season. Such events cause the trees to expend valuable energy reserves to refoliate, and consequently cause the trees' health to deteriorate. Depending on the condition of the trees at the time of defoliation, reduced growth, mast abortion, branch dieback or in some cases tree mortality, has occurred following a single year of heavy defoliation. Should subsequent defoliation occur the following year, the impact is compounded. Trees that receive light to moderate defoliation (<60 percent) are not likely to refoliate and there is probably no significant impact other than a reduction in growth, reduction of mast and possibly some minor branch dieback.

maturity; drought; shock due to recent timber cutting activities; previous year(s) defoliation; and other insect and disease related problems. In 2006, approximately 82.4 acres of defoliation were detected at Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center (Figure 4).

The Allegheny National Forest (1988) and the West Virginia Division of Forestry (1997) provide examples of the potential tree mortality that can occur. On the Allegheny National Forest, untreated stands consisting of 40-80 percent oak, the average loss of basal area (mainly oaks) was about 16 percent (range 3-28 percent) following one year of defoliation and 26 percent (range 10-43 percent) after two consecutive years of defoliation. In a 1986 study area in eastern West Virginia where oak species accounted for 63-78 percent of the species composition, a loss of 25 percent of the total oak saw timber and 14 percent of the total oak pole timber occurred after one year of moderate to heavy defoliation. In these examples, droughty conditions likely contributed to the level of mortality.

Based on observations of the existing health of the forested areas at Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center and the factors mentioned above, large areas of extensive tree mortality are not expected should defoliation occur in the absence of drought conditions in 2007. Mortality will be more prevalent if adequate rainfall is not received during the 2007 growing season. Mortality is also more likely if defoliation occurs in the same areas that were defoliated in 2006.

Management Options

In 2007, three management options have been evaluated for managing gypsy moth populations at Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center. The intervention options are offered based upon the following two treatment objectives: 1) protect host tree foliage to prevent mast failure, branch dieback and tree mortality; and 2) reduce gypsy moth population below the treatment threshold. Each is discussed below.

No Action Option

It is possible that gypsy moth populations could collapse on their own due to the presence of nucleopolyhedrosis virus (NPV) or the more recently recognized fungal pathogen, *Entomophaga maimaiga*. In areas with defoliating levels of gypsy moth populations (greater than 750 egg masses per acre) viral epizootics generally manifest themselves after significant tree defoliation has already occurred. Gypsy moth populations will usually peak in 2-3 years once they reach levels and then collapse as a result of NPV or fungal activity. Residual populations following such a collapse will likely remain at low densities for 3-6 years before rebuilding to defoliating levels.

Although it is not possible to accurately assess such events with the defoliating levels and then collapse as a result of NPV or fungal activity. Residual populations information at hand, it is unlikely that a collapse will occur in 2007 since most of these areas are newly infested and there is an abundance of large healthy egg masses.

Large numbers of gypsy moth caterpillars and defoliation has been shown to impact competing native herbivore arthropods. Sample et al., (1996) showed short-term impacts of both species richness and abundance occurred following light to moderate defoliation events in study plots in West Virginia. It is likely that impacts would be greater as the size of the area and intensity of defoliation increases and be more long term, should extensive tree mortality occur.

Should this option be selected, it is likely that heavy defoliation will occur in the western portion of Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center along with an area north of the airport in 2007.

Microbial Insecticide Option

Btk: The only biological insecticide currently registered and commercially available for gypsy moth control is the microbial insecticide *Bacillus thuringiensis* variety *kurstaki* (*Btk*). This insecticide is available through several manufacturers and has been used extensively in suppression projects throughout the U.S. in both forested and residential areas. *Btk* is a bacterium that acts specifically against lepidopterous larvae as a stomach poison and therefore must be ingested. The major mode of action is by mid-gut paralysis which occurs soon after feeding. This results in a cessation of feeding, and death by starvation. *Btk* is persistent on foliage for about 7-10 days.

Btk has been shown to impact other non-target caterpillars that are actively feeding at the time of treatment. An example of the potential impacts is provided by a study conducted by Miller (1990) in Oregon and Samples, et al., (1996) in West Virginia. Miller's study involved a large scale (5,000 acres) eradication program where three consecutive applications of *Btk* were applied within a single season. On Garry oak, Miller found that species richness was significantly reduced in treated areas during all 3 years of the study while the total number of immature native Lepidoptera rebounded after the second year. In the Sample study, the areas treated with *Btk* were 50 acre plots and only a single treatment applied. Here too, both species richness and the total numbers of native macro-lepidopterous caterpillars and adults were reduced but only for less than 1 year. The difference in duration of the impacts between these studies is probably the result of the number of treatment applications applied and the size of the treatment area involved.

Btk formulations are available as flowable concentrates, wettable powders, and emulsifiable suspensions. The normal application rates range from 24-36 billion international units (BIUs) per acre in a single or double application. *Btk* can be applied either undiluted or mixed with water for a total volume of ½ -1 gallon per acre. With proper application, foliage protection and some degree of population reduction can be expected with one application and with two applications both foliage protection and a greater degree of population reduction are likely.

Because *Btk* is a biological insecticide, the degree of population reduction varies and may depend on, at least in part, the selected application rate, relative health of the population

(building vs. declining), population densities, weather (rain and temperature), the feeding activity of the larvae following treatment, and the actual potency of the product.

Gypchek: A second microbial insecticide that is registered and available in limited quantities is the formulated nucleopolyhedrosis virus called Gypchek. This product is not available commercially but is produced in limited quantities by a cooperative effort of the USDA Forest Service and the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). The active ingredient in Gypchek formulations has a very narrow host range (lymnatriids) and occurs naturally in gypsy moth populations. Normally the virus reaches epizootic proportions when gypsy moth populations reach high densities as a result of increased transmission within and between gypsy moth generations. The application of Gypchek to gypsy moth populations simply expedites this process by increasing the exposure of the virus at an earlier stage. Healthy, feeding gypsy moth caterpillars become infected by ingesting contaminated foliage and soon stop feeding and die.

The efficacy of Gypchek treatments to reduce gypsy moth populations has been quite variable. Because of the short period of viral activity on foliage (3-5 days) as well as other biological factors such as feeding activity and weather conditions, it has been difficult at best to project treatment efficacy. Most often foliage protection can be achieved but significant reductions in gypsy moth densities do not always occur. Should inadequate population reduction occur, areas would need to be treated again the following year.

The normal application rate of Gypchek is 4×10^{11} occlusion bodies (OB's) per acre applied in a single application or 2×10^{11} OB's per acre applied in a double application. Due to the limited supply, priority is first given to state and federal cooperators that need to deal with federally listed threatened and endangered species associated with gypsy moth treatments. There are, however, sufficient quantities of Gypchek currently available for 2007 should this insecticide be preferred for use at Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center.

Chemical Insecticide Option

The third option is to use a chemical insecticide to control gypsy moth populations. There is currently one chemical insecticide registered for control of gypsy moth populations and approved by the USDA Forest Service for use in cooperative gypsy moth control programs.

Dimilin® (diflubenzuron) is the most widely used chemical insecticide in gypsy moth suppression projects in the U.S. Diflubenzuron (DFB) is an insect growth regulator that disrupts the normal molting processes of the larvae. The mode of action is to inhibit the formation of the molt following treatment. The method of uptake is primarily by ingestion, however. Some research has indicated the possibility of absorption through the cuticle as well. DFB is relatively persistent on foliage (24 days) which increases the efficacy on gypsy moth populations but also exposes non-target insects, particularly caterpillars, for a greater period of time.

Dimilin® is registered by EPA for use in residential and forested areas. It is, however, extremely toxic to some aquatic invertebrates and the label prohibits the application over open water or wetlands. DFB is available as an oil based liquid formulation (Dimilin® 4L) and is normally applied in a single application at the standard rate of 1-2 ounces of formulated material per acre. With proper application, foliage protection and a significant population reduction can be expected. The need for treatment of residual populations the following year is normally not necessary.

Alternatives

With the previously described options in mind, the following alternatives are offered:

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| Alternative 1. | - No action. |
| Alternative 2. | - One aerial application of <i>Btk</i> at the rate of 36 BIUs in a total mix of ½ gallon per acre. |
| Alternative 3. | - Two aerial applications of <i>Btk</i> , as in alternative 2, applied 4-7 days apart. |
| Alternative 4. | - One aerial application of Gypchek at the rate of 4×10^{11} OB's in a total mix of 1 gallon per acre. |
| Alternative 5. | - Two aerial applications of Gypchek at the rate of 2×10^{11} OB's in a total mix of 1 gallon per acre, applied 3-5 days apart. |
| Alternative 6. | - One aerial application of DFB at the rate of 0.75 oz formulated material in a total mix of 1 gallon per acre. |

RECOMMENDATIONS

As previously stated, gypsy moth populations are sufficient at Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center to cause heavy defoliation on 719 acres in 2007. To protect tree foliage and prevent subsequent tree mortality, our recommendation is alternative 3 (a double application of *Btk*).

This recommendation is based on the following considerations:

- 1) At the current gypsy moth population levels, it is likely that a single application of *Btk* will not provide either foliage protection or a gypsy moth population reduction.
- 2) A double application of *Btk* will likely provide both foliage protection and a significant gypsy moth population reduction.

- 2) A double application of *Btk* will likely provide both foliage protection and a significant gypsy moth population reduction.
- 3) A single or double application of Gypchek is less likely to provide both adequate foliage protection and sufficient population reduction.
- 4) Due to the toxicity of DFB to some aquatic invertebrates and with two large bodies of water in one of the proposed treatment areas, alternative 6 (aerial application of DFB) was eliminated from consideration.

REFERENCES

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- Gottschalk, K.W. 1990. Gypsy moth impacts on mast production, *In*: McGee, Charles E. Ed. Proceedings of the Workshop, southern Appalachian Mast Management; 1989 August 14-16; Knoxville TN; University of Tennessee; 42-50.
- Liebhold, A.M., Simons, E.E., Sior, A., and Unger, J.D. 1993. Forecasting defoliation caused by the gypsy moth from field measurements. *Environ. Entomol.* 22(1): 26-32.
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- Moore, K.E.B. and Jones, C.G. 1987. Field estimation of fecundity of gypsy moth (Lepidoptera: Lymnatriidae). *Environ, Entomol.* 16: 165-167.
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Table 1 - Results of the gypsy moth egg mass survey conducted at Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center, November 15, 2006.

Plot #	# em acre	em size (mm)	Plot #	# em acre	em size (mm)
1	80	32,30	15 ^z	1120	32,30,34
2	0	—	16 ^z	120	24
3 ^z	3680	30,28,38	17 ^z	13680	26,28,32
4	0	—	18	120	26
5*	800	30,28	19	40	24
6*	1960	22,24,22	20	40	—
7*	1160	26,16,18	21*	1080	26
8*	120	—	22 ^z	24320	26,24,24
9*	0	—	23*	0	—
10 ^z	160	24	24 ^z	6280	28,30,24
11 ^z	1520	28,34,28	25 ^z	400	22
12 ^z	2840	30,38,32	26 ^z	21360	24,22,22
13 ^z	9600	34,34,32	27	0	—
14 ^z	10420	30,36,28			

em/acre range = 0-24320

em/acre average = 3737

em size range (mm) = 16-38

em size average (mm) = 28

* = plot located within 2006 treatment area

em/acre range within 2006 treatment area = 0-1960

em/acre average within 2006 treatment area = 731

em size range (mm) within 2006 treatment area = 16-30

em size average (mm) within 2006 treatment area = 24

^z = plot located within proposed 2007 treatment area

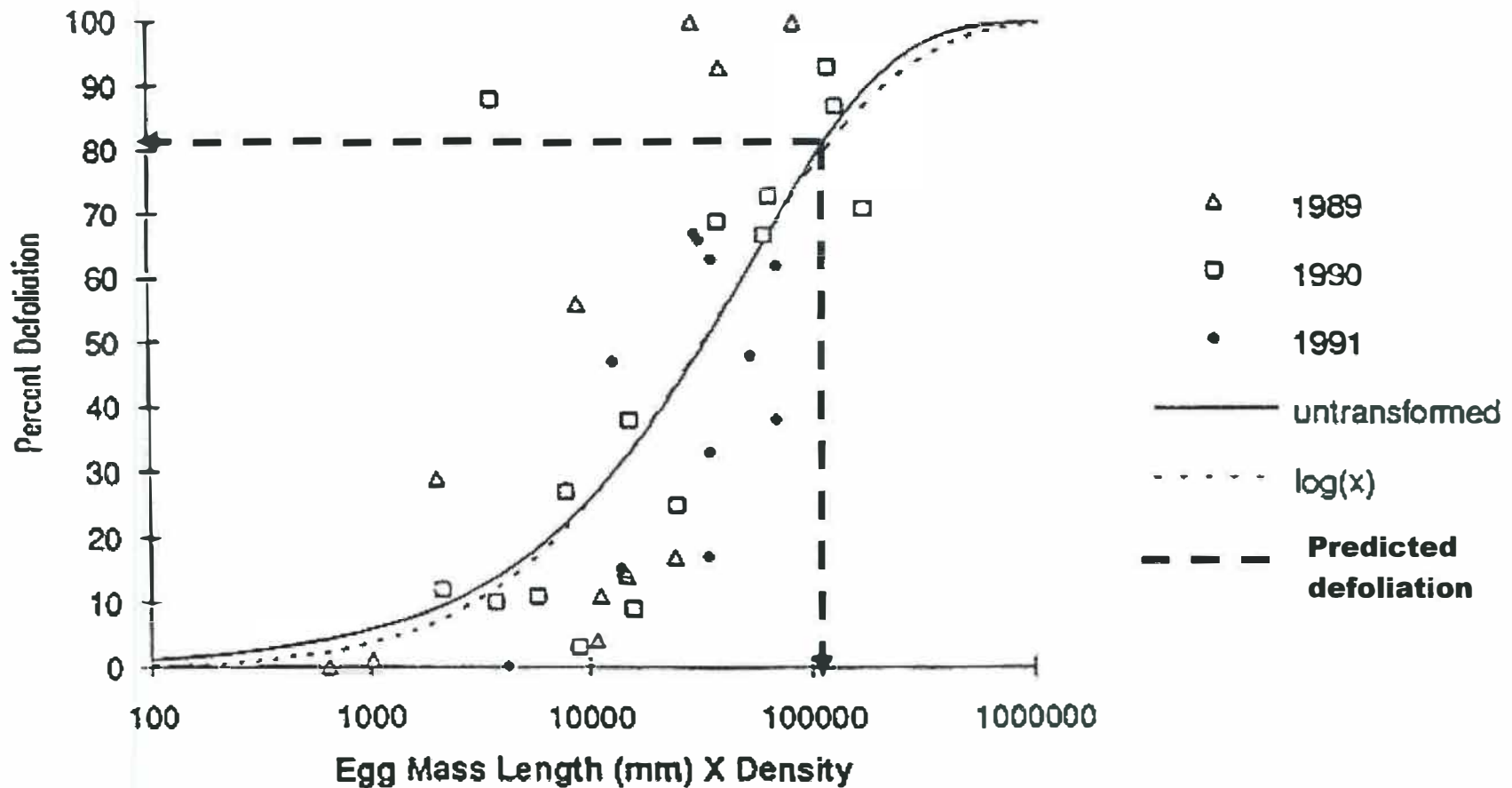
em/acre range within proposed 2007 treatment area = 120-24320

em/acre average within proposed 2007 treatment area = 7346

em size range (mm) within proposed 2007 treatment area = 22-38

em size average (mm) within proposed 2007 treatment area = 29

Figure 3.—Predicted defoliation in the western portion of Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center in 2007.



Scatter plot of the product of mean egg mass length and egg mass density versus mean defoliation.
Extracted from Liebhold et al. (1993).

Figure 1. -- Gypsy moth egg mass survey plot locations established on November 15, 2006, along with the 2006 gypsy moth treatment areas.

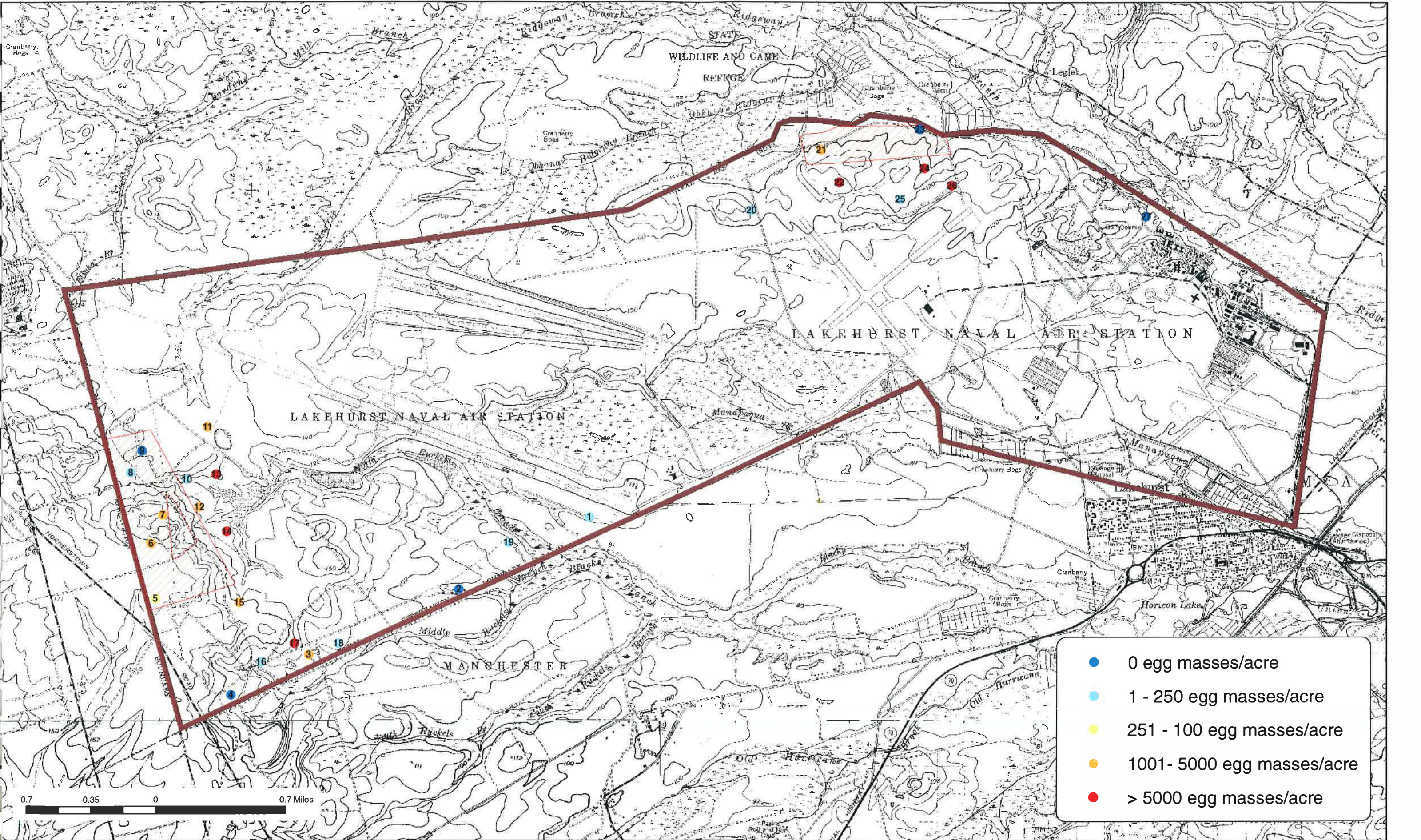


Figure 2. -- Areas where defoliation is likely/recomended treatment areas.

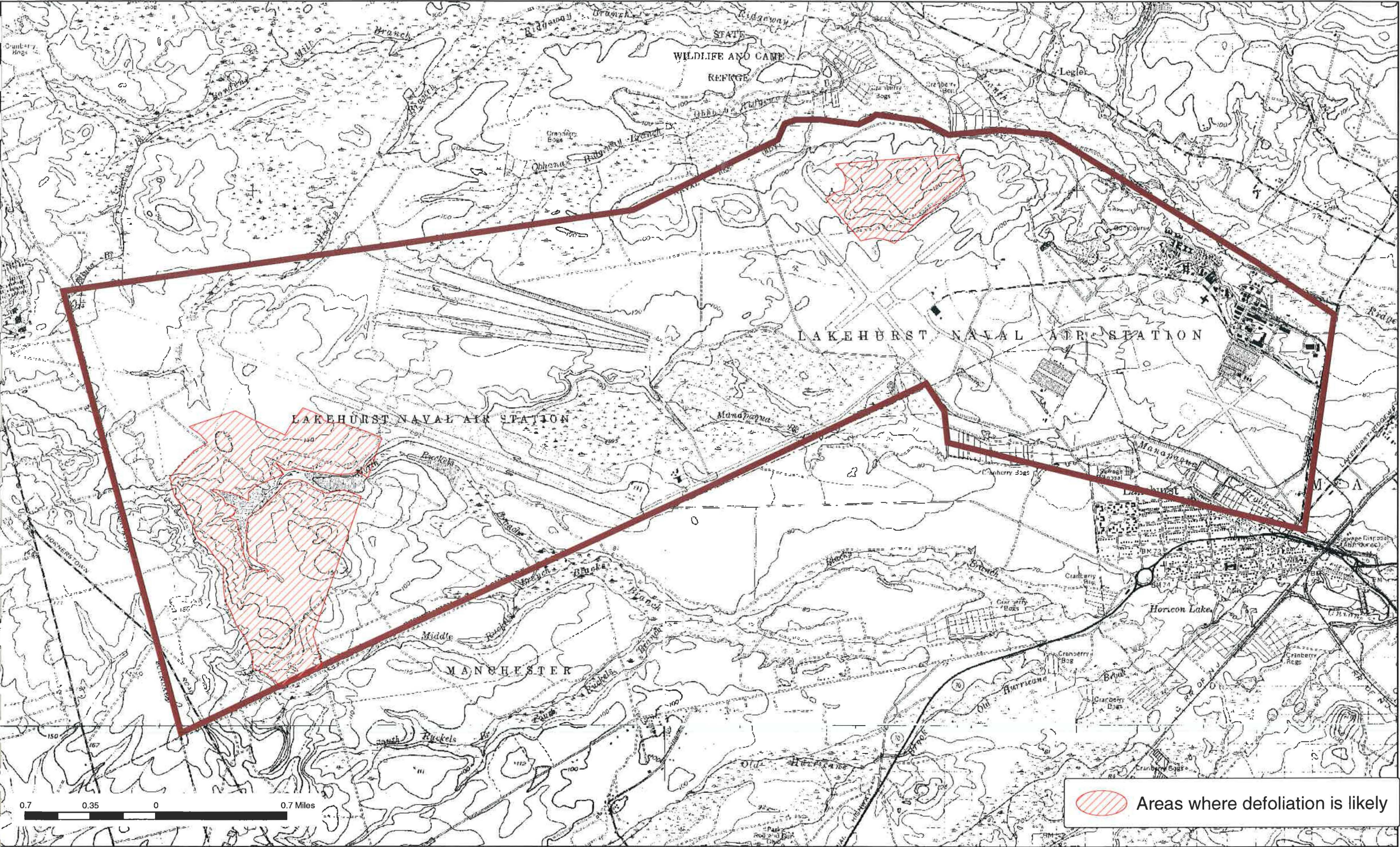
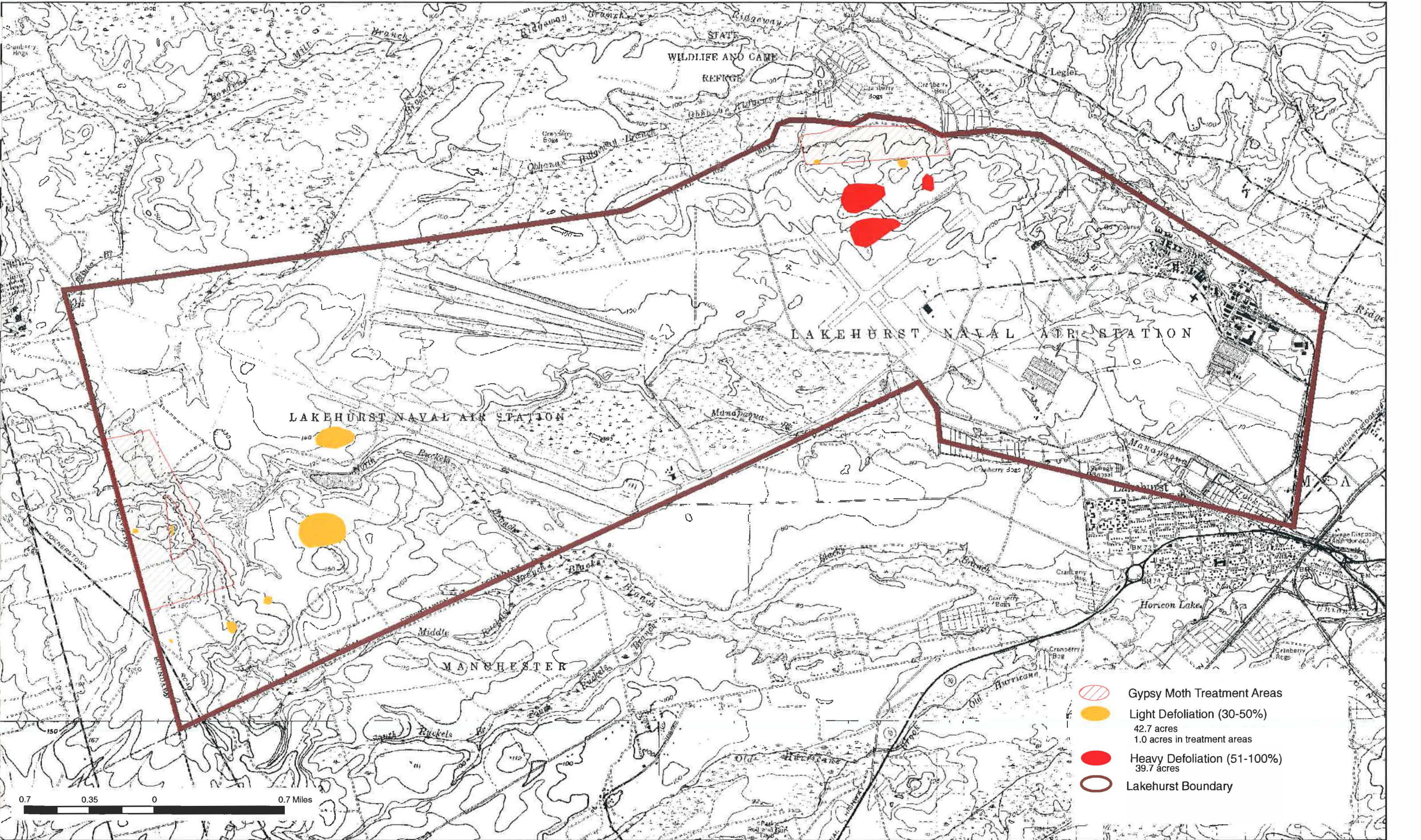


Figure 4. -- Results of the aerial detection survey conducted at Lakehurst NAS on June 15, 2006.





United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry

180 Canfield Street
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File Code: 3400

Date: January 3, 2007

Mr. John Joyce
Naval Air Engineering Center
U.S. Navy
Lakehurst, NJ 08733

Dear John:

Enclosed is the gypsy moth biological evaluation for Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center.

In brief, gypsy moth populations are sufficient to cause heavy defoliation on 719 acres. We are recommending a double application of *Bacillus thuringiensis* variety *kurstaki* (*Btk*). With good timing and proper application, gypsy moth defoliation should be minimal at Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center in 2007.

The current plans are for the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to incorporate Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center in their suppression program again in 2007.

Please contact me at 304-285-1555 if you have any questions regarding this gypsy moth biological evaluation.

Sincerely,

RODNEY L. WHITEMAN
Forester
Forest Health Protection

Enclosure

cc: Joe Zoltowski, NJDA
George Koeck, NJDF
Pete J. Egan, Armed Forces Board
Noel Schneeberger, AO

RLW/blm

